

## The Books of the Bible

### **HEBREW BIBLE (Older Testament)**

#### **Pentateuch**

##### Genesis-

...deals with the beginnings of such things as matter, the universe, plant and animal life, man, sin and the Hebrew race. The word *genesis* means "beginning" or "origin."

##### Exodus

...tells us about Israel's bondage in Egypt and their deliverance by God through Moses. *Exodus* means "going out" or "exit." The key work in Exodus is "Redemption."

##### Leviticus

...describes the duties of the Levites, who were the priests of Israel, belonging to the tribe of Levi. Here you find the divine instruction for the priests concerning worship, holiness and redemption.

##### Numbers

...covers about 38 years of desert wandering by the Israelites. It is called *Numbers* because there are two occasions in the book where the fighting men of Israel are numbered.

##### Deuteronomy

...gets its name from the Greek word meaning "second law." Just before entering the Promised Land, Moses gave his farewell address, which brought together the laws recorded in *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, and *Numbers*.

#### **Historical Books**

##### Joshua

...begins a series of 12 books that cover the history of Israel, beginning with Joshua (Moses successor), the conquest of Canaan, the judges and kings of Israel, the divided kingdom after king Solomon, until the fall of the Southern Kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar's armies. This marked the end of Israel's existence as a free and autocratic nation.

##### Judges

...has been called the "Dark Ages" of the Hebrew people because it describes 12 repeating cycles of Israel deserting God to follow heathen gods, suffering at the hand of oppressors, calling out to God for help, God sending a deliverer (a Judge), and then returning to the old patterns when the judge died.

##### Ruth

...takes place during the days of the judges, but instead of violence and immorality, there is tenderness and love. Ruth is one of the great love stories of the Bible.

##### 1 Samuel

...covers the period from Samuel's childhood through Saul's reign to the beginning of David's reign. Samuel was the last of the judges,; Saul was the first of the kings.

##### 2 Samuel

...deals almost completely with the story of David's life as king; but, the story ends in 1 Kings.

##### 1 Kings

...is a study of the life of Solomon, David's son, and the successor to the throne of Israel. The kingdom of David and Solomon is a political phenomenon without parallel in the Middle East. Though small in size, David and Solomon were the strongest rulers of their era.

### 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles

...record the reigns of Solomon and the succeeding kings of Israel and Judah. They cover a period of 400 years, and tell of the growth and decay of the kingdoms. In the end, both kingdoms are led into captivity- Israel to the north by Assyria, and Judah to the south by Babylon.

### Ezra and Nehemiah

...covers the last century of Old Testament history. It is an account of the Jews' return to their land and to Jerusalem from captivity, the rebuilding of the temple and rebuilding the walls of the city.

### Esther

...takes place in Persia, the land of captivity, where many Jews chose to remain after the captivity. It is a miraculous story of how the Hebrew race was saved from extinction.

### **Poetic Books**

#### Job

...deals with the age-old question, "Why do good people suffer?" This book explains that we will not always understand why things happen the way they do, and God is not obliged to explain them.

#### Psalms

...was the national song book of the Hebrew people. These were poetry set to music and used in worship. They emphasize the personal relationship one can have with Almighty God.

#### Proverbs (*pro = instead of; verba = words*)

...a short statement used instead of many words. They are wise sayings, condensed into dramatic scenes or contrasts that are easily remembered.

#### Ecclesiastes

...is Solomon's record of his experiences and attitudes when he was out of fellowship with God. He looks at life with all its complexities and problems and asks, "*Is life really worth living?*"

#### Song of Solomon

...is a love song- perhaps expressing God's love for Israel; perhaps expressing Christ's love for the church; perhaps a dramatic love story between Solomon and a very special lover. Regardless of the interpretation, this song celebrates the tenderness and beauty of human love, and affirms God's approval of physical love within the commandments He has given.

### **The Prophets- Major** (*Written during Israel's "days of gloom," they had abandoned their religion and their God.*)

#### Isaiah

...called the people of Judah to rebirth and renewal. His eloquent and timely message helped the nation avoid falling into captivity by the Assyrians, as he called them back to faithfulness to the Lord

#### Jeremiah and Lamentations

...were written during the last 40 years of Judah's existence. Jeremiah is known as the "Weeping Prophet," because he expresses such deep grief over the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem and the nation. Few men were ever more faithful and diligent in their life and ministry without visible results than Jeremiah.

#### Ezekiel

...explains God's actions in allowing the Israelites to be taken into captivity. The phrase, "*They shall know that I am the Lord,*" is used nearly 70 times in this book. When other nations had been as sinful and stiff-necked as Israel, God destroyed them. But, God continued to honor His covenant with Abraham. He was punishing them for their sin, but at the same never stopped drawing them back to Himself.

### Daniel

...was in Babylon as an exile from Judah, where he was taken as a young adolescent around 606 BC. Daniel is to the OT what Revelation is to the NT. It is filled with prophecy and visions that leave no doubt that God was revealing the future through His calling of Daniel.

### **The Prophets- Minor**

#### Hosea

...is calling the people of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) to *return* to the Lord. The main theme is *God's redeeming love*.

#### Joel

...uses the occasion of a plague of locusts, which have devastated the land, to warn of a more dreadful judgment to come. He calls this coming judgment, *the day of the Lord*, a term that is returned to in the NT.

#### Amos

...is a herdsman, with no theological training. But he is called directly from his work in the fields to take God's message to Israel.

#### Obadiah

...prophesies that God will punish Edom, (distant relatives of God's people through Esau), for standing by and gloating when Babylon invades Judah. The theme is God will punish those who harm his people.

#### Jonah

...is a narrative about Jonah, himself, rather than a collection of prophecies. There are two main themes: 1-when God calls you, it is best to say "Yes!" and, 2- God's redeeming love extends to all people, and no one is beyond hope.

#### Micah

...is composed of 3 sermons, each one beginning with the word, "*Hear.*" He warns both Israel and Judah of the coming judgment, and offers pardon if they will repent.

#### Nahum

...is written about 150 years after [Jonah's] great revival in Nineveh. They had fallen back into their old sins. Therefore, God calls Nahum to preach of the final judgment of Nineveh and her violent and brutal empire.

#### Habakkuk

...deals with the perplexing theme, "*Why do the wicked prosper?*" The prophet goes to God in prayer, and waits for an answer.

#### Zephaniah

...deals with the coming invasion of Nebuchadnezzar as a figure of the Day of the Lord. His warnings are unheeded, and God's judgment falls on Judah.

#### Haggai

...is called to encourage the people to finish the rebuilding of God's temple after becoming discouraged and abandoning the building project for 16 years. He teaches that a lack of concern for God's house reveals a lack of concern for God's glory and honor.

#### Zechariah

...is a contemporary of Haggai during the rebuilding of the temple, and is called to encourage the people. The strongest theme of Zechariah is the coming Messiah.

## Malachi

...is the last of the OT prophets. The enthusiasm started by Haggai and Zechariah is gone. The people are again cold and backslidden, and it is reflected in their worship, which is routine and not from the heart.

## **NEW TESTAMENT**

**Gospels-** Our best historical record of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ

### Matthew

...stresses the kingly nature of Jesus. It is directed primarily to Jews, and draws special attention to the ways Jesus fulfills Hebrew prophecy. This gospel was written to convince the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

### Mark

...is the shortest of the gospels. It was written to convince the Roman people, a culture that was attracted to power and achievement, that Jesus was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

### Luke

...has a universal scope. The angel's announcement of *great joy, which shall be for all people*, the story of the Good Samaritan, and many other passages show Luke's concern that **all** people understand that Jesus died for **all**.

### John

...was one of the 12 disciples, and therefore was eyewitness to most of what he tells in his gospel. His book was written much later than the other three, and is concerned with proving Jesus' deity. In chapter 20:31, John states, *"I have written these things so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."*

## **History**

### Acts

...is also written by Luke, and is a continuation of the story of Jesus. It begins with His ascension, recording what Jesus continued to do by the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the church. Some call it the Acts of the Apostles; some refer to it as the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The book records the spread of the gospel and the planting of churches throughout the Middle East, Europe, Asia Minor and Africa.

## **Epistles- (Letters)**

### Romans

...is the most complete, most logical, and clearest presentation of the Christian faith to be found anywhere in the NT. This letter was Paul's way of preparing the churches in Rome for his coming.

### 1 Corinthians

...is Paul's answer to a letter inquiring about several matters of church doctrine and practice. He also rebukes them for their sins. No other letter in the NT deals so specifically with local church problems.

### 2 Corinthians

...is Paul's expression of his relief that his last letter to the Corinthians had not been so harsh that it had disheartened them. The last letter had been so painful for him to write that he had cried as he penned it. Paul is joyful that the church in Corinth is ready to receive him, again.

### Galatians

...is written to explain to the church in Galatia that a person is not saved by faith PLUS keeping the Jewish law, but by **FAITH ALONE**.

### Ephesians

...is divided into two parts. Chapters 1-3 reach heights of Christian thought and doctrine found nowhere else in the NT. Chapters 4-6 give practical instruction for how to live this new life in Jesus.

### Philippians

...is written so that Christian would know how to live a life of Joy in a world filled with trials and unhappiness. This book provides practical insights for Christians today who wonder how they can be joyful in the midst of disappointment and heartache.

### Colossians

...was written to correct some wrong ideas about Christ that were being taught in the towns of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis.

### 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians

...are some of Paul's first letters. The theme of both is the return of Christ, and *Coming* is the key word. Paul stresses the *nearness* and *suddenness* of His return. Paul is writing to Christians who have become slack and lazy in their occupation, and in their Christian testimony and service. Some had quit working and had been "mooching" off the church, while others were perplexed about what would happen at the Second Coming to their saved relatives who had already died.

### 1 Timothy

...is the first of the "pastoral epistles"- Letters written by the apostle Paul to the young men (Timothy and Titus) he mentored in ministry. They are practical and personal, and deal with the pastoral work of the church. It is of interest that Paul addresses Timothy as *his beloved son in the faith*.

### 2 Timothy

...is written from prison as Paul faces imminent death by a Roman sword. Paul again writes to his *dearly beloved son* in the faith. Paul longs for his companions in ministry, his books and parchments, and a warm cloak.

### Titus

...is written to encourage and instruct Titus as he leads the churches in Crete. Very little is known about Titus; he is not mentioned in *Acts*, we know from other books that he accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. This book, like *1 Timothy*, includes God's qualifications for church leadership.

### Philemon

...is the shortest of Paul's letters. He writes on behalf of Philemon's slave, Onesimus, who has stolen some money and run away to Rome. Paul meets him in Rome, leads him to Christ, and comes to love him as a son. Paul persuades Onesimus to return to his master, but also pleads with Philemon to be lenient and show him grace.

### Hebrews

...is written by an unknown author. It seems to be written to Hebrew Christians who were being tempted to return to their Jewish practices. The theme of this letter is the superiority of Christ.

### James

...is thought to be written by the James that is the brother of Jesus. The letter is a protest against hypocrisy. Salvation by faith results in holy living, and a faith that does not produce works will not save. This assertion led some leaders in the first few centuries to exclude *James* from the canon of the Bible.

### 1 Peter

...is addressed to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor (Turkey), in order to encourage them during a time of persecution, and to challenge them to continue to live lives that reflected the character of Christ.

### 2 Peter

...is concerned with heresies and immorality that had crept into the church over time. He assures them of the truth, and encourages them to continue to grow spiritually, their best protection against believing false teachings.

### 1 John

...was written that men might *know* they have eternal life. It is concerned not only with people believing, but also living out their faith. He says the true test of a person's faithfulness to Christ is his conduct.

### 2 John

...is written to an individual lady in the church and to her children. It is to warn them about false teachers and to tell them not to receive them into their home.

### 3 John

...is written to the *well beloved Gaius*. He had apparently been excommunicated from the church by a dictatorial leader, and John's letter is to encourage him, and expresses the hope John will get to see him soon.

### Jude

...is written by the brother of James, the half-brother of Jesus. He writes to warn the church about "godless men who have slipped in among them." They use God's grace as a license for immorality, and deny they Jesus.

### Revelation

...is written to encourage Christians during a time of severe persecution. There are many symbols that are difficult to understand. But, there is also much that is quite clear. John describes his vision of heaven, with Christ the Lamb on the throne. And, he describes his vision of the very end of all things as we know them, and the coming of *the New Jerusalem*, here on earth. John writes:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

*NIV (Revelation 21:1-5)*

\*These descriptions are largely derived from the "*Journey of a Lifetime*" course, by Tommy C. Higle. The course is a 52 week study through the entire Bible.